

John M. Boyle
2530 Hillegass Ave APT 209
Berkeley, CA 94704

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Application Review Subcommittee
c/o Kevin McCormack
Senior Director of Public Communications & Patient Advocate Outreach
California Institute for Regenerative Medicine
1900 Harrison St., Suite 1650
Oakland, CA 94612

To whom it may concern:

I am writing today to support Berkeley City College's (BCC) application for a Bridges Training grant. Taking BCC out of consideration, simply due to its size as a community college, would be a mistake.

I am an alumnus of the CIRM's Bridges training program from July 2012. This opportunity was given to me by Dr. Barbara DesRochers at BCC. At that point in my life and academic development, I had lost my way. Dr. DesRochers was one of the first college-level professors that had shown an interest in me and confidence in my abilities. This faith allowed me to turn my life around and get to where I am today.

The Bridges training grant allowed me the opportunity to work in the laboratory of Dr. Robert Blelloch at UCSF. It was during this time that I had my first "ah-ha" moment in biology. I realized that I was seeing something that no one else had seen, and for a moment, it was something new and mine alone. Following the end of my grant period, Dr. Blelloch hired me to continue with my project before heading to the University of California, Berkeley (UCB) to complete my undergraduate degree in Molecular and Cell Biology.

In my final undergraduate term, I used the skills developed at BCC and in the Blelloch lab to impress my professor enough that, without prompting, he recommended me to a new faculty member at UCB, Dr. Dirk Hockemeyer. It was in Dr. Hockemeyer's lab where the confidence that Dr. DesRochers imparted to me allowed me to thrive as a research specialist and lab manager. And with time, to continue my education by joining the Ph.D. program there.

In this program, I have used human embryonic stem cells to study the regulation of telomeres and telomerase, fundamental to development and, when misregulated, cancer. What started with that spark of faith in Dr. De Roches' classrooms and labs has become two peer reviewed research papers (one as the first author), poster presentations at multiple conferences, and a selected speaker presentation at EMBO's Workshop on Telomere Biology in Health and Human Disease in Tróia, Portugal.

Additionally, during this time of global crisis, I have used what I have learned to help set up a COVID-19 testing facility in the Innovative Genomics Institute at UCB, as well as working on the variant sequencing effort. These projects served both the UCB

community and the greater bay area community serving first responders, the unhoused population, and others.

None of this would have been possible without the faith Dr. DesRochers showed me and the opportunity that CIRM gave me through BCC and the Bridges program. Additionally, my cohort from BCC produced a medical doctor, a Ph.D. candidate at MIT, a Ph.D. candidate at UC Riverside, and a research scientist at Bristol-Myers Squibb, just to name a few. These are the results you can expect from the students Dr. DesRochers selects from the Bridges program. Not supporting her efforts would be a mistake and deprive us of some very talented people.

Sincerely,
John M. Boyle
Ph.D. Candidate
Molecular and Cell Biology
Hockemeyer Lab, University of California, Berkeley